

Island: Warrenton family moved to St. Croix, faced Hurricane Maria

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Bill also noticed there was a need for people with computer skills. He decided to apply for a couple of jobs and was soon employed with Hide Tide Solutions. (Two years later ITT Tech closed all of its campuses and cut 8,000 jobs; had the Joneses stayed, one of them would have been Bill's.)

When this opportunity opened up, Sam supported the idea. She had lived in St. Croix with her father when she was younger. It was only for a short time, but she always knew she would be back.

Hurricane Maria

St. Croix is a small island, only 22.7 miles long, and the widest area is less than 8 miles across. It is the largest of the four U.S. Virgin Islands (the others are St. Thomas, St. John and Water Island). St. Croix is located just east of Puerto Rico, which is less than 50 miles away.

All of these areas were impacted when Hurricane Maria, a Category 5 storm, passed through the area in September 2017, only two

weeks after Hurricane Irma had damaged many Caribbean islands. Before Maria made landfall in Puerto Rico, the storm's outer eye-wall hit the Virgin Islands hard, affecting the whole region.

Survivors speak of the time before Maria, and the time after. The hurricane impacted everyone. From morning to evening, life had changed for survivors. St. Croix looked like a war zone. Many homes were destroyed, powerlines were down, poles and trees blocked roads.

Most of the island lost electricity, and a curfew was ordered for safety reasons. The residents could only be outside from noon to 4 p.m. There were long lines for gas, ice, food and water. For the first two weeks, the Jones family had to get water from a cistern. They were among the people who lived 105 days without electricity.

"It's been a crazy ride after this hurricane," Sam said. "There are so many things I have lived without that I don't feel I need anymore."

When the hurricane warnings were issued, the Jones family started preparing to minimize

damage. They put all their belongings, including mattresses, into plastic bags and stored the bags in a closet and bathroom. They evacuated for a safer location where they stayed overnight. Sam said she could not sleep that night.

She watched movies on her iPad to distract herself from the howling wind outside.

"The hardest part of Hurricane Maria was the unknown of the first day," Bill remembered. "Being away from our home was difficult because we had no idea what we would return to, if anything."

New normal

When morning finally came, they could see Maria's destruction.

"Everything went from being green to brown," Sam said. The lush vegetation had been wiped out. Trees and power lines were down. Buildings were destroyed throughout the area.

"I am still amazed how our own home, a small mobile home, survived with just a little damage from the forceful winds," Sam said. "Many of our neighbors were not that lucky."

Public buildings, including schools, were also badly damaged. When the students were able to return to school, classes were arranged into different facilities. Sam said they sent a couple of the girls to school in the mornings, and then one for afternoon classes. This was the new normal after the hurricane. The Jones girls were happy to attend sports practices again after a long break.

The recovery for the Caribbean islands will continue for a long time. The tourists will find their way back to the area and help build the economy. The biggest attractions have not changed; the clear, blue water, sandy beaches and warm sun are still the same. Life continues in these tropical islands. Surviving the recent storms has only developed stronger bonds between friends and families.

Sam and Bill Jones and their children continue their lives in St. Croix, and they appreciate finally being together as a family — and living simpler lives on an island they now call home.

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FRIDAY EVENING TV SCHEDULE table with columns for time slots (6 PM to 11:30) and rows for various channels (KATU, KOMO, KING, etc.) listing programs like Jeopardy!, Wheel Fortune, and various news and entertainment shows.

SATURDAY EVENING TV SCHEDULE table with columns for time slots (6 PM to 11:30) and rows for various channels (KATU, KOMO, KING, etc.) listing programs like American Idol, Jeopardy!, and various news and entertainment shows.

SUNDAY EVENING TV SCHEDULE table with columns for time slots (6 PM to 11:30) and rows for various channels (KATU, KOMO, KING, etc.) listing programs like America's Funniest Home Videos, Jeopardy!, and various news and entertainment shows.